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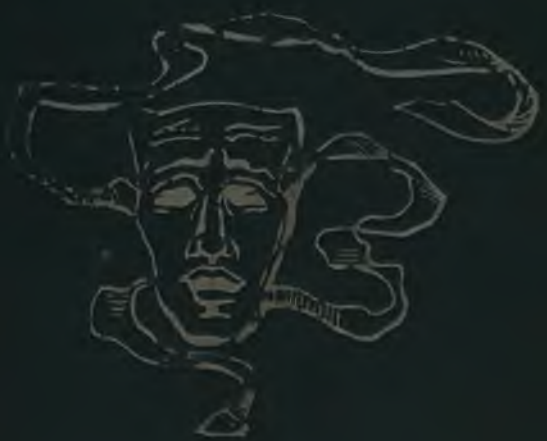

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"WORRY"

BY

RALPH KENT BUCKLAND

Author of "In the Land of the Filipino," and "Philippine Journeys"

University of California

BOSTON
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY
1914

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Sherman, French & Company

TO

DOROTHY ELIZABETH PERRIN

WHO, THROUGH THE GLOOM OF A NORTHERN WINTER
AND THE DREARINESS OF A RAIN-DRENCHED SPRING,
TRACED WITH FREQUENT LETTERS
THE FLOWER-BEDECKED LAND, CALIFORNIA,
WITH ITS MOUNTAINS AND ITS SEA,
THIS BOOK OF "WORRY"
IS MODESTLY INSCRIBED.

320290

IN WAY OF PREFACE

"Worry," once upon a time,
So quaint legends run,
Killed a great big Thomas cat —
Killed him dead! Clean through at that!
So he was not worth a rat!
Shot as with a gun!
Putrid in the sun!

'Tis a story sad to tell,
How the germ got in.
First a back yard fenc-ing party;
Then a rival, fat and hearty.
Envy, unrest — *meanness* — partly,
Soaked him full of sin,
Letting "worry" in.

"Worry" since that far-off time
Many scores has claimed;
Bored each like a gimlet small;
Cracked and seamed each cranium wall;
Forced upon each death's dread call.
All for what they aimed
"Worry" *all* retained.

"Worry" then with hand of iron
Must be held in tight,
Lest Life's sorrows troubles brew;
Lest Life's burdens dungeons hew;
Lest Life's pathway ruins strew;
And the struggler's might
End in darkest night.

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"WORRY"

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING A QUERULOUS MATRON

Mrs. Simkins lolled back in her rocking-chair before the stove, rubbing her eyes wearily as, with her feet on an old-fashioned hassock, she strained with all the weight of her ponderous, unwieldy bulk the sustaining power of the rear curves of the rockers.

Rockers, well she knew, were designed primarily, to ease the troubled mind, to soothe with assuaging rhythm the torn and wretched nerves of the tired housewife, or to help the man of the house through an evening of restful motion after a more than usually strenuous battle with world cares. Rockers, she realized full well, were intended solely to offer to a more or less miserable state a mild and, if properly manipulated, an inexpensive nerve tonic in form of a diverting sameness of movement such as that with which the fond mother allays the restlessness of her babe — back and forth, back and forth. They never were fashioned to serve as points upon which one might balance with delicious though precarious indecision while submitting to the process of cerebral digestion a

thought or a plan causing in itself not a little infelicity of mind in the slow process of its being paraded before an already tantalized and much harassed intellect.

Mrs. Simkins knew all this, yet she sat poised regardless, cogitating, very much absorbed, deep in the mental gymnastics which have taken unto themselves among Americans as a class the name "worry." With the backward swing of the chair she paused, perilously poised, her weight on the tips of the rockers, her balance maintained by the hassock upon which her generous sized feet rested. She stopped a moment in her even back and forth, hesitating as though the better to assimilate a hazy or but half-grasped portion of what was on her mind.

Sufficient evidence there lay down in the front cellar under the parlor (for though the house was small, its cellar was walled off into rooms) of the risks to be chanced in attempting thus to interrupt the steady swing of a chair, in trying thus to pervert the long well-understood functions of the rocker; there in that front cellar, a crippled article of ease, lay John's favorite chair, a relic of their first days of housekeeping, one of the long curved rockers broken squarely off close to the frame. There doubtless it would lie for some time to come ere it could be restored to its erstwhile usefulness and beauty. Certain monetary annoyances obsessed the family, the

repairing of broken pieces of furniture could not be planned for even for a moment.

Reasons there were for even stricter economy than ordinarily: a distressing accident had accompanied the collapse of the chair. Its consequent state of lameness (for it had lost, if not a leg, at least a rocker) had in the bringing about thereof been the cause of consequences that had been a source of deep-seated and persistent "worry" to Mrs. Simkins, gifted as she was in that line, for John, to whom Mrs. Simkins was indebted for the surname she, with such conscious pride, bore aloft far above the perplexities of a sordid world, had, in his fall from the height to which he had attained at the tip end of the rockers, been precipitated in the general collapse backward as well as downward, and in such a doubled-up manner that his right arm had been fractured between the elbow and the wrist: "the radius," said the doctor.

John had not only been considerably shaken up and broken up in this sudden and quite unanticipated descent from balanced dreaminess; his mental equilibrium as well had been wrenched quite a twist out of plumb. He was and had been since the "catastrophe," as he persisted in dignifying his hasty and unlooked for drop to carpet levels, very much troubled in mind as well as in body. In a word, he too was *worried*.

Other accidents and unlucky incidents had,

from time to time during the married life of the Simkins, been brought to them (or thrust upon them rather) for them to bear. Anxieties, however, had not been with this pair something coming to them solely and inseparably through the marital state. Each could still remember certain unpleasantries, *worry* breeders, appertaining to that now distant period well along in the half-forgotten past, some twenty-five years ago, when each was breasting as best each could the trials and wrinkle-developing episodes forming, of the torture of existence in this human shape, a very large share — at any rate, so thought the Simkins.

Despite Mrs. Simkins' proclivities for borrowing trouble, for urging herself across all sorts and lengths of bridges before any of them came well within the scope of her eager, always-reaching-out imagination, she had always maintained a very generous avoirdupois from the day she and John decided to *worry* along together till the very day and hour she taxed in a moment of abstraction the ability of mere wood to sustain her. She had, in fact and in consistency, always felt more or less concerned about her weight for fear it might be significant of a tendency toward a dropsical disorder. But as yet nothing save fat had developed, and she was what one might with unblinking veracity call well.

Her unevenness of mind, it is true, her searching after petty anxieties, in the long-drawn-out introspection and self-analysis to which she daily brought her brain in torture, had made her face so thin and wan that it scarcely seemed to belong at all to her corpulent body; her face revealed her daily perturbation.

And John! Mr. Simkins! He *worried* too; but mayhap — early leanings in that direction to the contrary — it was largely a matter of falling in with his spouse.

Just at this time there was, perhaps, legitimate cause in the Simkins family to give free rein to the insignificant little imp that "ravels the sleeve"; for with John's broken arm and the double trial of doctor's bills to pay coupled with the inability to go to do any work at the factory, besides the tiresome details of the day-by-day struggle always and forever with Mrs. Simkins, a load more weighty than her burden of flesh seemed weighing her down.

She rubbed her eyes again as though to massage and to make less noticeable the tell-tale crow's feet lined at the corners, then:

"John," she called, jeopardizing her almost teetering position the more by craning her neck around the edge of the tilted chair-back so as to bring within view her patient and incapacitated husband seated as comfortably as possible, his disabled arm resting easily pillowed on an-

other chair. "John!" she reiterated argumentatively, "I'm worried." Saying which, Mrs. Simkins dropped from her pivot perch and began once more her slow, easy swing.

"Yes?" vouchsafed he to whom she spoke, with just a shade of weariness in the interrogation, just enough to hint at a lack of sympathy with her state of mind, an inclination the indulgence of which Mrs. Simkins never allowed John for a moment to give way to without an altercation. She enjoyed, reveled even, in having concerted action in all pertaining to family cares; she brooked no half-hearted acquiescence in bearing the burdens of life.

"Yes?" she caught up his question. "Yes!" she threw back at him emphatically, "and I should think you would be worried, too. Here it's been two whole weeks since we've had nothing coming in and doctor's bills to pay, and, and," she hung on her word and stopped atip once more the motion of her chair.

"*Whole* weeks?" facetiously muttered John, for though he worried, he could sometimes see a faint glimmer of the leaven of life away off in the gloom.

"And," went on Mrs. Simkins, "you know May fifth's Em's birthday, her eighteenth, and she just wants to give a party — a class party she calls it, though why when it's her birthday! Well, it's only two weeks off, anyway. If the

weather would just warm up, so as we could do away with this fire, and if you hadn't broken that chair, and—"

Again Mrs. Simkins paused. When she worried the results of her cogitation were apt to be brought forth in sections.

"It's her eighteenth birthday," Mr. Simkins took up the thread of controversy; "but that only means that she's almost out of school—"

"Almost out of school!" interrupted Mrs. Simkins. "Almost out of school! And do you know, Mr. Simkins, may I ask, what almost out of school means?" Mrs. S. rocked with nervous energy. "May I ask?" she iterated with some show of sarcasm.

"You may," mildly agreed Mr. S., a twinge of pain in his arm and that terrible itchy feeling always accompanying the healing of a fractured bone distracting for a moment his thoughts from the import of the question.

"Oh! I *may!* Well, I was just a-going to say that her getting out of school means that there'll be her graduation dress and a whole pile of other truck to get ready for her. Besides, she's just set, clean set, on havin' a class party. Of course, we'll have it for a birthday party too and maybe we'll shove it a little further on into May, but do you know what all *that* means?"

"If you would hear me out!"

Mr. Simkins picked up his splintered arm tenderly, the pillow on which it rested too, and began pacing to and fro, as is the manner of men who find expense piling inconsiderately on lack of income.

"I was about to say when you interrupted me," Mr. Simkins continued with dignity, "I was about to say that when Emma was finally out of school for good and all she could get a place somewheres and could help us out here at home a little, and (as though by second thought) she can help Myra a little with her clothes until she gets through her schooling, and then, why then, of course, she'll prob'ly find some likely fellow and up and marry him."

"Up and marry him," sniffed Mrs. Simkins. "Yes, she'll up and marry him all right; but I guess from the way that Joe Kuntz hangs around her, she'll up and marry before she *ups* much to help us out any here at home. And Joe workin' reg'lar and a-gettin' his two a day."

The rocking-chair kept up a steady oscillation for some little time, then Mrs. Simkins commenced again — this time a little reminiscently:

"And as for helping My! You know the way it's always been, and is always likely to be. Em's the one likely to be helped, and My's the one likely to do the helping, besides the little

we can do. Why, now she braids her hair tight and ties it up with strings so that Em can flash that hair ribbon we bought for My's Christmas up and down that high school room. I hain't said nothin', but I've noticed lots. Do you know My hain't (Mrs. Simkins' grammatical errors were the result of carelessness rather than of ignorance — even thus it was with her dropped 'g's,'— for as she always kept before her family, she had been 'to school') a single nice handkerchief to her name? Em, she just rakes in all she can get."

To this recital of his elder daughter's peculiarities of disposition Mr. Simkins uttered not a word in reply. Never before had such an analytical presentation as to the relative merits of his two daughters from the standpoint of selfishness been the topic of conversation between the two.

Mrs. Simkins had talked long-windedly before — indeed she had, and on more than one occasion — but never had "the girls" come up as far back as he could recollect for such a thorough going-over. The social obligations of Miss Simkins were evidently bearing down upon his wife, and the lack of funds — well, that was getting on his mind also. Since his fall there had been much to think of.

If they but owned their home they could — but they didn't. They were renting, and so

there was no use thinking anything about raising a little money that way.

And John, having walked off a little of his nervousness, reseated himself in his chair and rearranged his several cushions and pillows.

"My dear," he observed, glancing back to the stove where his wife still sat rocking, "my dear, if you are thinking of going down town this afternoon, you might as well get me six or so cigars. That box Jacobs gave me is all gone. You know I didn't have a smoke yesterday; and I guess this worry —"

But he was not allowed to finish.

"Yes, this worry!" almost screamed Mrs. Simkins, as she skated her chair away from her, and stood in her righteous wrath. "This worry!" scornfully. "There's never been a man yet, at least that I've known anything about, that didn't think trouble, just a mite of extra care, was brought around to his door special just to give him leave to go and bolster up his pet habits."

Mrs. S. made her way toward her husband.

"I *am* going down town this afternoon," she added impressively, standing before him, "I *am* going down town; but I'll confine my purchases to *necessary* things, Mr. Simkins. I shall buy sugar, beans and a piece of meat."

"But you know, my dear, I didn't mind so long as the swelling was so bad and my arm

hurt me so. It seemed then as though I couldn't think of nothing but the ache. But now it's better, *some* you know, I just seem to feel so fidgety and unsettled all the while. I want my smoke."

"Well, you can fidget and unsettle about that party Em's got to give, if you must have something to feel flighty about. Planning how we're going to manage it will likely ease your constitution a bit. If you want to risk gettin' that arm bumped out of place on the car you can go down to the city and buy your own tobacco. But I wouldn't if I was you. As for me, Mr. Simkins, I draw the line at caterin' to notions."

Mrs. Simkins whirled, and sailed with a women's-temperance mien out into the dining-room and thence to the kitchen where, in this most important of all rooms of her home, she began that series of mysterious shakings, mixings, stirrings and tastings which with the noon hour was to go to the table a deliciously wholesome though inexpensive meal; for Mrs. Simkins, after the manner of many of her sex, counteracted the heat of her temper and abated the worry frittering away her composure by expending all her skill in the preparation of a meal befitting the appetites of two hungry schoolgirls, to say nothing of a (doubtless by this time) penitently tractable better-half.

Promptly on time with the coming of the car

up the street from the city came the two Simkins daughters. They found not only a meal awaiting them, but a mother, capable and persistent, with a look of strong purpose lighting her eyes. They wondered in an undertone to one another:

"What is Mother *worrying* about now?"

As Mrs. Simkins glanced at her daughter Em, the thought flashed through her brain, "She's just like her father, a mite selfish."

CHAPTER II

WHEN A GIRL GRADUATES

Spring came to Bleakdale rather tardily that year. January and February had stuck and clung to the very letter of that old saying which makes the lengthening of days bear along with their added hours of sunlight a corresponding length of vacuum above the mercury in thermometers. March had come in snowy, windy, and then intensely cold, the freezing weather forming a heavy crust all over the white covering so thick and strong that the proverbial lion might have prowled around for days over the dazzling white parquetry of closely set crystals without breaking through, and without anywhere in his roving coming in contact with his compatriot in simile. March continued a lion down to the very last hour, and even the first few days of April felt the lashing of his angry tail as the raw winds swept the city and the country round about.

Bleakdale did not belie its name those days. The latter part of April, although generally sunny and springlike in the feel of the air, was nevertheless too chilly and damp, especially in-

doors, for one to think of being able to get along without a fire, even for the sake of relieving just a trifle the strain on the family income. And so the long, dreary, cold days brought with them considerable expense to the denizens of this north temperate region; and to that large majority, those having but slender, altogether insufficient purses, with the expense came the necessity for careful management of the family funds, for painstaking watchfulness along all lines of expenditure.

Wood had been so scarce early in the fall and after the cold spell set in as to be practically unprocurable at any price; and coal, though to be had when one paid cash — that is, certain unprivileged "ones"— came at what has been incongruously called a "pretty" figure. It did not seem at all a "pretty" figure to those dwellers in cold, desolate Bleakdale.

Provisions rose sympathetically in price. Those who had been able in the early fall to lay in bushels of potatoes, some onions and a few squashes, and had had the foresight and the industry to "put up" tomatoes and a few cans of fruit managed on a fairly economical scale. Others, less wary of the turns of fate, of the weather, and of fluctuating market values, found themselves almost mired monetarily, and only able to struggle along toward a reluctant spring, with its promises of warmth and a

cheaper livelihood, by painful exactions on bodily strength and on patience.

The inhabitants of Bleakdale were not greatly concerned at any time with the dictates of Dame Fashion. Tight fitting costumes for women, with their specious hint at economy because under-garments were through the scantiness of the dresses made well-nigh superfluous, had passed Bleakdale by, as had the balloon sleeves and skirts of an interminable number of yards around some years previously. Those of Bleakdale — that is, the feminine portion — maintained what they among themselves considered the happy medium in styles; they neither gathered an exorbitantly impossible number of yards around the waist, nor did they, on the other hand, go to the extreme of having their skirts — when, at rare intervals, some one of the little suburban place contrived to get enough together to buy a new one — so tight that there would be a stretch at the seams and a give in the weft and in the warp at every sitting. Clothes, with most of those of Bleakdale, were made on a good, comfortable, easy-going, utilitarian pattern, so as to last from season to season until actually threadbare and quite past wearing.

Notwithstanding durability of style as well as of material, a winter of such exceptionally low temperatures had made necessary the purchase of some new clothing.

There was, to be sure, one man of the community who never felt the "pinch of poverty." This was Jacobs — Mr. Jacobs, as every one called him to his face — the pioneer, the aristocrat of Bleakdale, one of the first to take up his home to the right of the electric line running on to the city whose outskirts were even then reaching out as though to enclose and hold on to the little settlement. And Mr. Jacobs, like many another on the ground early with a fund of stick-to-itiveness and some ability, prospered apace.

To him and to the monthly rent they paid him, many times with flagrant irregularity, several families of his immediate neighborhood were indebted for the roofs over their heads. To him and to his good nature — and likewise to his forethought in acquiring a competency — those living in his vicinity as well as in his various houses were indebted now and then for little pleasantries, little kindnesses, which, together with his lack of stringency in regard to prompt payment of rent due him, made him one for whom everybody had a good word.

In all Bleakdale there was no one — such is the solicitous attention always accompanying the comings and goings, yes, even the stayings, of one of comparative riches — to whom those dwelling in the village looked up with greater respect, tinged just a shade with obsequious-

ness, and among those who, having been specially favored, had had occasion more than once, to feel a warm glow of gratitude suffuse them, with an affection bordering almost on reverence, for, after all, Mr. Jacobs was one of the oldest thereabouts.

The extreme cold and its accompanying expenses and discomforts had, as with many another to whom Mr. Jacobs had found it necessary to be lenient, struck the Simkins family heavily. The severity of the weather of the opening months of the year, followed by the accident which had befallen Mr. Simkins while attempting to abate his financial difficulties by a pivotal recapitulation of his affairs, had all together brought the family funds to a very low state.

The girls still continued to attend school, walking the couple of miles or more in the morning ("East End High" was in the residence district) sometimes carrying with them their lunches, sometimes coming home on the car when there had seemed little or nothing left over in the house with which one might make ready a shoe-box luncheon.

Had it not been her last year in school, her graduation year, Emma, because of the accumulation of family trials, would perhaps have given up the struggle, and would have sought some employment more lucrative than that of now and then helping out Mrs. Jacobs with a bit of

work on Saturdays or afternoons after school —"would perhaps," for one could not always place Emma. What work she did was not done that she might add the little she received to the family fund; selfish motives guided her occasional industry.

But Mrs. Simkins, mindful of her own pride in her girlhood advantages, was determined that both her children, could she by any contriving manage it, should graduate, as she incorrectly put it. And so schooling climbed bravely over purse barriers, though Mrs. S., even in the doing, worried with consistent constancy as to how it was going to be done.

Of late the girls had been coming home for dinner every day, for since their father's fall their midday appearance had seemed to give him pleasure.

The Friday afternoon, a half holiday, following Mrs. Simkins' admission that her mind was a little more than usually askew, she followed her youngest daughter, Myra, out into the kitchen as they both busied themselves in ridding the table of dishes and of "left-overs."

"Em's birthday's only a few days off. It don't take long for a couple of weeks to slip round when there's a lot to do to fill up the time. Before we know it the house will be runnin' over with that graduatin' class. I just told your pa we'd have to strain a point, for

'tain't every year a girl can graduate. Oh! They'll be runnin' all over, and maybe we'll be ready, and maybe we won't." Indecisively Mrs. S. rehearsed the theme of her morning's mind's uneasiness.

Myra placed her load of coarse white dishes in the sink, a plain unenameled iron one, inferring a kitchen far from modern.

"If only the winter hadn't been so bad and pa hadn't had to fall, and there hadn't been so much to pay out and—"

Myra, like her mother and like the wife of a certain Biblical character, would look back—persisted in doing so, in fact, many times with tears, salty ones.

"Come, My, crying don't pay. 'Tain't your party anyway, though you'll have to do a lot of the plannin' and a good large share of the work, and if we can't afford it, it'll save you just that much fuss. Em's studyin' now and she'll be studyin' good and steady, depend upon it, if there's much work around. I told her 'twould be just as well to study Sunday afternoon and catch up anything extra hard after Sunday supper; but seems like there's no time like dishwashing time for gettin' book learnin' into your head. Oh, I don' know!" sighed Mrs. S., as she whisked through the open door into the dining-room, pie tin and cloth in hand to brush the crumbs from the table.

After the manner of women with the "worry" temperament, Mrs. S. was a rapid though painstaking worker. Had she been more deliberate in her movements while doing her work around the house, less time would there have remained to her in which to wrangle hazy suspicions and to line up for minute analysis half-formed ideas of what the future might hold in store for her. In one quick, thorough round of brushing she had rid the tablecloth of the little evidences of carelessness on the part of those who had just eaten; she had with a few whisks of the broom made the faded rag carpet of the little dining-room look brighter, as though carefully gone over; and, after setting the chairs straight back against the wall, she had gone to help My finish wiping the dishes.

"You know I'm goin' down town this after', My," she confided, as though making a repetition, "and while I'm down I'm goin' to look at some plain white lawn for Em's graduatin' dress. She'll have to have one, though goodness knows what we'll do without to get it. I've gone without sugar in my coffee ever since pa was hurt, and we've all sopped our bread in the gravy since I don't know when to save butter, to say nothin' of how you've had to go to school in any old thing, though whole, My, no rags or tags." Mrs. S. wiped away a tear, half of sympathy, half of lacerated pride.

"We'll have to get the goods early," went on Mrs. S., "and you and I'll have to cut it out and make it, for Em'll have her hands full with her essay. I guess we can borrow a pattern of Mrs. Jacobs. They're about of a size, for Em's a bit big. We've got to have something different from common duds. If Mrs. Jacobs won't lend us, I'll have to get a pattern down town."

And Mrs. S. rambled on with her elaborate planning. Meanwhile dishes found themselves, with scarcely a jar and never a nick in the finding, neatly put away behind a faint-figured but clean length of calico curtaining a set of pine board shelves only too evidently of the store-box variety.

Myra stayed to wipe off the stove, to rinse the dishrag and to tidy the kitchen, while her mother, her errands on her mind, hurried on her way upstairs through into the front room where sat Emma deep in her English grammar (the high school teachers were making a final effort to give the mother tongue a footing more certain, more secure than heretofore before sending out into the world the recent products of their pedagogical efforts) and where sat Mr. Simkins lightly napping after his noonday meal.

As Mrs. S., attired for the street and for the shopping district in a dingy black skirt, a warm

though worn jacket, and a hat far from "chic," descended the stairs but shortly after she had ascended them, there was a step on the porch and the sitting-room door opened with that familiar and assured ease indicative of the custom of the near-by neighbor, privileged through long acquaintance or because of general compatibility of temper and similarity of taste, imagined, assumed or real. Catching sight of Mrs. Simkins as she opened the stair door into the sitting-room, the visitor began volubly:

"You're goin' out, Mrs. Simkins. Go right along. I just came in for a moment, anyway. I won't let you set down now. Go right on your errand, whatever it is. I will talk to Mr. S. and the girls a moment, and then I'll be a-runnin' home. Don't wait a moment for such as me."

Mrs. Brown was one of those gifted mortals who anticipate any likelihood of controversy by a rapid fire of statements almost mandatory in tone, and sometimes actually so in results; but this time, having listened indecisively, Mrs. S., already a little overstrung, with a feeling of warding off an attempt at dictating (although she well knew her neighbor's disposition) settled herself down in the rocker near the fire as Mrs. Brown took a chair over near Mr. S.

"There's no hurry at all. I'm goin' down town, to be sure; but I don't have to mind about

gettin' back early. Myra can get the supper." It was peculiar of Mrs. Simkins that she never pet-named any of her family outside the family circle.

"Now go right along; don't mind me. And I'm goin' to bring you over some cooked tomatoes with bread in them to help out My's meal," — Mrs. Brown was always liberal with her liberties. "Don't you wait another moment. It's two o'clock already," insisted she; then turning sympathizingly to Mr. Simkins: "how's the arm this damp day? Hurts, don't it?" she answered herself unhesitatingly, catching, doubtless, a gleam of suffering in Mr. S's. off eye.

"Well, Em," she kept on, glancing at the open grammar, "school's most out, ain't it? Glad of it, I'll bet."

"She'll be glad to graduate," replied Emma's mother for her, "and I'll be glad to have her. But she'll be sorry enough next year when she sees Myra gettin' ready for school and knows that she must be gettin' ready for work. One thing I'm going down town for is to get Emma some white goods for a dress, something that'll make up nice and fluffy."

"Some dotted mull is what she wants," averred Mrs. Brown with compelling suggestiveness.

"Well, no, I think she's set her heart on

lawn." Mrs. S. glided smoothly on, regardless of Emma's hurried look toward her. "She says it makes up so beautiful and looks so elegant and slim. We don't buy many clothes, so I thought this once I'd let her have just what she wants." Mrs. S. braced everything all along the line.

"I should think dotted mull would be better and far prettier. Plain lawn is apt to look so slazy, and there's always so much light at commencement — not that I've been since Maggie graduated — my niece in the city, you know, Mr. Simkins," she explained to Mr. S. as though his memory might have suffered along with his arm. She had a way of being excruciatingly specific when men were around, as though special explanations were their just due.

"Well," she went on, rising, "it's plain to be seen, Mrs. Simkins, you'll never get started down town while I'm here talking, so come on. There's a car up the street now. I'll go out and wait with you at the gate till it comes along. Good-by, Mr. Simkins, you'll soon be out, I'm sure. And Em, mull's better than lawn. Lawn's so wilty if the day's a bit damp, and you'll sweat anyway somethin' awful up on that stage. Get the mull, Em."

Just as the two got down the steps, Mrs. Brown called back:

"My, you save a place for them tomatoes I'm

a-goin' to give you for your supper. Your ma'll like 'em when she gets back. They're mighty nice the way I fix them with bread," she concluded complacently.

"Mrs. Simkins seems to me worried," mentally commented Mrs. Brown, as she waved a sort of inclusive good-by to the rapidly disappearing car.

CHAPTER III

BLEAKDALE ECONOMICS

Mrs. Simkins returned from the city rather late, hungry and altogether worn out, but bringing with her, besides a few table supplies, the dress pattern of plain white lawn which had been the chief object of her visit down town.

She had started bravely on her search for something suitable yet cheap, going from store to store without finding just what she wanted until she became so tired she had almost to drag herself along. She had seen two or three pieces she might possibly decide upon could she find nothing better, but she would wait and go back after she had tried a few other places.

It must have been the fifth (or was it the sixth or seventh?) store where she had inquired, with a hesitancy more of weariness than of timidity, although she was not just at her ease on the city streets, for "some lawn, some nice plain white lawn for a graduatin' dress — not too dear, about five cents"— that the clerk to whom she addressed this set query, a woman of about her own age, instead of immediately lead-

ing ner to a pile of loosely woven material, inquired with real interest:

"You have a daughter in this year's class?"

"Yes, Emma Simkins, my oldest child."

"I think I have just what you want. I, too, have a daughter being graduated this year. I bought her a dress off the same piece. I'm sure you'll like it. We've had the piece in the store a good while, and it's a little shopworn, so it's on the bargain counter." The kind-hearted clerk turned to see if her apparently weary customer were following as she made her way to the rear of the store. "Now, if you don't want to put very much into a dress and yet feel you must have something fine, this is just what you want," and she added with warm friendliness, "that's just why I chose off this goods." Hauling out a part of a bolt of fine white material a little mussed and a bit creamed in tint from having been long on hand, she unrolled a yard or more and held it out that Mrs. Simkins might see. "I'll tell you just what I am going to do," she confided. "I had my pattern cut off as soon as the goods was marked down for fear it would all be gone, and I'm going to wash it in light suds and put it out on the grass the first hot sunny day. That will bleach it out like new. You know this dreary weather won't last much longer. It's such fine material I know it will make up soft and lovely. The light

washing will, I should think, improve it. I told my daughter — Carrie Jones is her name; you must ask your daughter Emma (Mrs. Jones recalled names readily) about her — I told her there would not be a daintier dress amongst them. And it's only six cents," she continued; "was fifteen. They call it Persian lawn. It's nothing at all like the five cent kind of stuff you were thinking of getting."

Mrs. Simkins, already convinced that she had within her hands just what she wanted, hesitated a moment, partly to consider the extra cent a yard over what she had planned to expend, partly to give the impression that she was weighing the matter well and was taking time to focus the light of keen judgment upon the material in question.

"Well, you see I had only wanted to pay five cents," she deliberated.

"I wouldn't mind, if I were you, the extra cent. Let the worry go this time," Mrs. Jones said laughing, as though looking back on many of her own twistings and turnings to stretch a cent. "Your Emma will never dress herself for her own commencement again, you know; and really, there is no comparing this cloth with anything anywhere around the price. To be sure, you'll have to wash it, but I know you can do it up to look like new."

Mrs. Jones was very patient, for she herself

had sailed her little craft of financial matters very close to the wind for many and many a year. Well she knew that a penny saved is a penny *safe*. And so Mrs. Simkins decided on the bargain, although it was a little more than she had intended paying.

"Where do you live?" interestedly inquired the clerk, Mrs. Jones, as she measured off the lawn and wrapped it up.

"At Bleakdale — down the car line, you know."

"Oh, yes! Quite a ways out, isn't it? I'll tell my daughter who is going to have a dress like hers. But, of course, they won't look alike after they're made up. What are you going to trim with?" she turned again to her customer, having replaced the bolt of lawn. "We have some very pretty laces; cheap they are, too. Would you like to look at them?"

Mrs. Simkins had thought to make tiny ruffles of the material itself do for trimming, but could not resist the temptation of a two and one-half cent edging, especially when told that all the girls would trim to some extent with lace, as laces were very much "in."

"There goes the meat money for tomorrow's dinner," said Mrs. S. to herself, as she rapidly made mental arrangements for robbing Peter to pay Paul; "but we'll have potato soup instead and that'll do just as well if I borrow a

piece of salt pork somewheres to make it nice and rich. And to think," with some asperity, "and to think that Mr. S. had the gall to ask me to get him some tobacco, when we've so much on hand already!" The clerk caught a, to her meaningless, jerk of her customer's head.

The package was opened, the few yards of cheap lace were tucked within, and then it was carefully done up again and tied, this time, for fear the lace might fall out.

It was already late, so Mrs. Simkins, though she meant to include only the clerk who had been waiting upon her, nervously bid a sort of general good-by to those near her, some of whom looked somewhat surprised at the tired, sensitive looking woman as she made her way to the door. She had yet a few purchases to make before taking the car for home: some sugar and a little of one or two other things. Tired she was, utterly exhausted, as along about seven o'clock the car stopped at the corner to let her off to walk on past the three or four houses from the corner to her own gate.

Myra was on the lookout and rushed immediately to the kitchen to reheat the few things they had had for supper for her mother's belated meal. Emma sat indifferently, book in hand. She herself had been out for a walk down towards town in the late afternoon, and had come home just as Myra and her father

were finishing their supper. She sometimes did walk a while before the supper hour down the road in the direction of the city following the car line, but rarely was she late for her evening meal.

There were those who said that at times the car would stop on its way from the city at the very outskirts of the little suburb to let off a single passenger, empty dinner pail in hand, who would make his way straight up to a young woman ostensibly there in the path at the side of the road with no other object in view than that of meeting a stalwart young working man and walking back, deep in conversation, toward Bleakdale with him. There were those who felt quite sure they knew the young fellow; but as the meetings — almost clandestine, since the car was generally filled with passengers for a town still further down the line — had covered a period only of weeks and even then only occasionally, they had not remarked them sufficiently to speak with any certainty about the matter.

Bleakdale, anyway, had several new families who had settled there the September of the year past, and the severity of the winter following had somewhat congealed that spirit of curiosity relative to the new arrival so prevalent in small gossiping towns. It might be, very probably was, a young man from one of these new families who met the young lady, now and then, waiting

near the trunk and beneath the shade of a large oak growing almost on the roadside path.

Emma, at any rate, had been out for a walk, and was busy with her book once more when her mother, quite near the end of her powers of endurance, pulled herself with evident exertion up the steps to the little landing before the front door — by courtesy a porch, though there was no roof. Mr. Simkins reached the door just in time to turn the knob with his injured hand.

"You hadn't ought to leave your arm without a pillow. What did you want to be so everlastingly polite anyway for? I guess I'm not so done out but what I can turn a knob. I didn't get you any tobacco, if that's what you're so anxious to know about. Awful to be without your smoke, ain't it, and here I didn't have enough money even to buy our meat for tomorrow!"

Mrs. Simkins was tired enough and sufficiently overwrought to indulge in sarcasm, the certain outlet of nervous tension with the quick-witted — unless tears come first — and judiciously secretive enough to fail to say anything about her little extravagance of the afternoon, her indulgence in the pride she took in her daughter's appearance.

Mr. S. with a sidelong glance at his weary wife, decided in a rapid moment that a full

stomach helps over many a family divergence of opinion and threatened altercation.

"Now, My has your supper all nicely warmed over for you. You go right out and set down."

He forbore to tell her, however, sympathizingly, how tired she looked, and how sorry he felt that she had had such a trying afternoon. "Least said soonest mended" experience had taught him.

Just then My, bringing in a cup of tea from the kitchen, called cheerily:

"Supper, Mother."

And Mother, throwing aside her jacket, slipped out into the dining-room and into a chair as though she could not for the life of her possibly tell how she had ever managed to get there.

"Why Mother, your hat!"

"Oh, never mind the hat! Let me have a sip of this tea."

But Myra, after having set the cup of tea before her mother, unpinned the hat, laid it on a chair near by, and smoothed for a moment with her steady young hand the tired brow.

"I put sugar in your tea, Mother," she said affectionately.

"I'm glad of that"— Mrs. S. accepted the little extravagance as something she had earned —"a little sweetening when you're tired and worried is just the thing."

"And I saved a dish of the tomatoes Mrs. Brown brought in. She said I should be sure not to eat them all up. Cooked with bread they are. I know you'll like them."

There was besides a slice of bacon and some potatoes fried in the fat, so altogether Mrs. S. made out very well. True to her husband's theory, her stomach's needs having been attended to, immediately her spirits rose and her temper lost its edge.

Emma all this time had sat by the lamp to all appearances deeply absorbed in her book. She had paid no attention to her mother's return other than barely to look up for a moment indolently, although she doubtless realized that the long round parcel which her mother carried under her arm (the other purchases in her hands) contained something of interest to her. She had let the package lie on the table where her mother had aimlessly dropped it on her way out to her supper.

Upon coming into the sitting-room Mrs. Simkins, anxious to see whether her purchase of the afternoon would still appeal to her, rested as she was and more capable of judging — moreover desirous of finding out what Emma thought about the goods — went to the parcel and unwrapped it, laying a fold of the lawn across Emma's lap, that she might examine it without in any way incommoding herself.

"I think it's just beautiful. Don't you, Em? So fine and soft!"

Emma nodded a half-hearted approval rather as if to say she was sorry she had been born into a family too poor or too "do-less" to afford silk for daughters.

"But see, Em," went on her mother enthusiastically, as under the mellow light of the coal oil lamp the material took on even a finer weave than it had in the store, while its slight dinginess was almost unnoticeable, "just see how fine and hangy it is. You'll look as slim as a — as a —" Mrs. S. groped for a suitable simile. "You'll look as slim as a trolley pole," she concluded, smiling lightly at her far-fetched comparison. "And Mrs. Jacobs she says, 'Slim's the thing,' though goodness knows we never bother our heads about the styles here, only Mrs. Jacobs; and she wouldn't if she didn't have that sister-in-law down in the city to spur her up — her brother's wife, Pa," answering Mr. Simkins' look of inquiry. "And do you know, Em, I never would have done so well if I hadn't had a clerk who 's a mother to wait on me. Her daughter is in your class, Carrie Jones. Do you know her more than to know of her?"

"Oh, Carrie!" was Emma's languid, disinterested reply.

"Well, she's goin' to have a dress just like

yours. The material 's the same, though maybe the makin' 'll be different. Likely will be. I never would have got it if it hadn't been for that Carrie's ma. She was so 'commodatin' and she just had me get this bargain. Fifteen cents, Em, a yard —"

Em brightened perceptibly.

"And I got it for six."

Em resumed her wooden manner.

"The lace, Em, see the lace! Mrs. Jones' daughter has some too. You two'll be the best dressed on the stage."

But Myra was the one who took real interest and enjoyment in the new dress goods. She was glad of the feel of the lawn, glad to know she was to help make the dress, glad to know, after a long season of privation, that the family had something new in the house even if it was not to be hers.

"I'm going to run down to Mrs. Jacobs right now, girls. It's not so very late and she may be lending that pattern to some one else if we don't speak for it early." Mrs. Simkins looked toward her daughters, as she again put on her jacket, so hurriedly thrown aside some little time before. She did not tell Emma they would have to wait for a hot May day sun to whiten a new look into the bargain goods.

"But, Mother, you must be tired to death

after all your tramping around down town. There wasn't much left of you when you got home, remember," admonished Myra.

"Buyin' somethin' nice and gettin' it cheap and havin' a nice meal to end the day when a person is worn to a shadder would rest any soul. This mornin' I was all in pieces worryin' about that dress and that party and when I got home tonight I was 'all in'; now here's the dress already bought and lace to trim it, which I hadn't thought of buyin'. Oh, I could walk a mile," resumed Mrs. Simkins, "and never know I was goin'. You'd rather have lace on your sister's dress than meat in your stomach anyway, wouldn't you, you unselfish child!" And Mrs. Simkins in the exuberance of her mood kissed her younger daughter warmly. "Never you mind, I've a very nice dinner planned for tomorrow. Do you know," presciently, "I can almost see Em's party just around the corner of the middle of May."

Mrs. Simkins had spells of being far, far up afloat the fleecy whiteness of the clouds, and they in part compensated for her periods of deep, wrinkling depression.

The whole family was to feel the uplifting effects of having something new in the house. When the next week wore on and a few days more, and the weather became sunny and warm

with the coming of May, the Simkins household began to bloom in spirits as did the flowers under the urging of the summer sunshine.

It was close on to ten o'clock when Mrs. Simkins returned from her visit to the Jacobs. She had the promise of the paper pattern for the "slim" dress just as soon as Mrs. Jacobs could cut out a new cambric she was going to make from it. Besides the promise she had something else on a little plate covered over with an inverted paper bag. This she took immediately down cellar and put it into her little screen cupboard.

"I guess we'll have some mighty fine potato soup for tomorrow's dinner, good and rich," she said to the family upon returning to the sitting-room. "I'll tell you, Em," she added with marked emphasis, "I'm awfully glad I could see my way through to getting you that lace."

Obviously Emma's ambitions were not to be compassed by a bit of trimming. She seemed preoccupied. Had she, too, caught the "worry" fever?

CHAPTER IV

DOWN THE CAR LINE

The car stopped this bright, sunny, beautiful, zephyry May morning, as was its custom morning after morning, probably from force of habit on the part of the motorman, for nobody ever seemed to press any of the little shell buttons at intervals along the interior. The car stopped for more than a moment down past the heart of the city quite in the "West End" at the corner of a large brick building back a ways from the street, on its face a factory — unquestionably so from the immense stacks in the rear over what was evidently the boiler room and, too, from the thick, jetty volume of smoke issuing for the moment therefrom.

It was but a little after the first whistle, so the crowd of some twenty (most of them men whom the car had picked up from corner to corner on its first trip down from the east end of the line) filed leisurely out, dinner pails held close to the sides for fear an inadvertent jostling might dislodge thereby some of the viands within and might in the spilling render un-

eatable a choice piece of pie or else of cake, for like the plaster of the world's second city, lunches lose much — if not all — by a too early mixing. Having disgorged well-nigh all its early morning load, slowly the car moved on down the line on its way to the suburbs of the "West End."

The men and the four or five girls who had just alighted stood, for the most part, in intimate little groups in the factory yard, gossiping and chatting, or else talking seriously. There were many others there also waiting to begin work besides these who had just arrived, for the factory was a large concern employing both men and women by the score, many of whom lived within walking distance of the plant, others who came in by car from various parts of the city. All were waiting in the delightful air of the fresh, crisp morning for the second whistle to summon them to their day's work.

Even those who took a real interest in their monotonous employment (the vast majority do not, for factory work of the day laborer is to many a nerve-racking repetition of doing this or that little, trifling bit of thing, in itself alone insignificant, meaningless, always the same — only in its assembled form having a definite and realizable value), even the painstaking, wished the whistle might forget to blow that delicious morning, so much more enjoyable was it to

stand on the grass beneath the trees out in the open air than to sit or stand at thought-stifling employment within the close, ugly red brick of the walls doing this or that tiny mite of thing over and over again interminably. Had any of them stopped to think, they might have reached the conclusion that even their daily wage scarcely compensated for the complete sinking of personality, the merging of individuality, at least for a large portion of the day, into one dreadful abyss of sameness.

But many of them had no individuality, no personality worth sinking or in truth sinkable. Many there were, in fact, who lolled listlessly in the sun against the hot tinted red of the wall speaking to nobody, apparently waiting, waiting, waiting, just languidly loitering, resigned to begin the daily grind, waiting as doubtless they would wait thirty, forty, fifty years hence to be swept as uncomplainingly, as dormantly, as unresistingly, into eternity.

One of one of the live groups who awaited the beginning of his toil, not on the hard gravel of the walk close to the horrid red of the brick, but out on the refreshing green of the grass close to the maples, was a young man of perhaps three and twenty, certainly not many months more. His coat hung evenly over one arm stretched out, the hand lightly, not leaningly, placed against a maple's trunk as though he

enjoyed the cool feel and slight unevenness of its bark, and the dinner pail in the other kept up a slight, easy, not-at-all-impatient swing.

The seven or eight in the group waiting near him, of which he formed a part, seemed to take rather a special interest in him, as though they enjoyed something in his personality, restful perhaps, attractive certainly in that it attracted — or was it by accident that these same ones grouped themselves on so many occasions when time was theirs near him?

There are those even in the common walks of life who seem to possess a magnetic something about them, quite without their being conscious of it or its power, that raises them a little or a great deal above the level of those with whom they are constantly thrown. Not always a brilliancy is it; many times only a friendliness, a constancy, a sincerity of disposition.

This young man of about three and twenty had not been for long at the factory — merely a matter of months — yet in that length of time he had made a place for himself save in the hearts of those apathetic automatons to be found in all large groups of individuals. He was accounted a fine workman by his employers, a good, well-meaning fellow by all the employees who did any accounting, and by a certain few with intimate friendliness bordering on something akin to homage.

They had been talking such a little while it seemed to them when the second whistle blew and the workers in this busy hive filed in rapidly to their several places.

"Hurry up, Joe," called some one, without looking back, as he hurriedly ascended the three steps to the open factory door. But there was no need, for "Joe" had started at the first sizz of steam in the great whistle, and was even then busily at work finishing off little castings of iron which when assembled with other companion pieces made up the mechanism, a labor-saving device, the principal product of this "West End" house.

So passed the morning, each one in this busy place intent upon doing the little successively given him to do as well as he could from force of character rather than from any absorbing interest in his lack-variety occupation; or slighting the tasks as near the border line of loss of salary as could be risked with any degree of security in not being found out.

Joe Kuntz was not one to slight anything to which he might lay his hand. Into his work, no matter what, he threw a quiet enthusiasm which compelled whatever he might be doing to yield to him, if to no one else similarly engaged, an interesting side, and so Joe's working period, as with any one trying to make the most out of the flying hours, passed as time always did for

him, whatever he might be doing, rapidly and pleasantly. Each pay day found waiting for him a full pay envelope without a cent deducted for any cause whatsoever. Those who knew said that Joe had been able to lay up quite a nice little sum of money.

"You must have about enough to start housekeeping on by this time," one of the group by the maple had said jokingly that very morning, one who for all his agreeableness as an acquaintance and faithfulness as an employee was known to indulge in recreation a little more stimulating and considerably more expensive than that of attending picture shows. And just a boy he was, too.

One could not anger Joe, and "kidding" slipped over his head as though he thought it quite beyond any possibility that any one would consider him of sufficient importance to care to waste any time trying to tease him. He had answered readily enough without a hint of complacency:

"You are right, Jack. I *have* quite a bit laid by — for a rainy day," he added vaguely, smiling slightly and coloring almost imperceptibly. One could see with but half a try that Joe was getting off one of his dry little pleasantries. Evidently the money was not for a rainy day at all, for there was equivocation in the meaning smile and covert sensitiveness in

the slight blush. Could it be the money was for a sunny day, a day without a cloud anywhere in the blue above, a day of great happiness for Joe — and for one other?

Joe's morning passed away and in the passing there was always a half formed smile lighting his contented countenance; in his eyes there was the light of joy agone and joy ahead.

When the noon hour came several there were who made their way to where Joe sat with his lunch, and Jack had much to say about a generous sized piece of cake which Joe ate — so they all said — as though it were something more than ordinary cake, to which Joe ingenuously replied:

"It *is* more than ordinary cake, to be sure. My mother made it," and then added without a show of suspicion, scarcely of average curiosity, "come, Jack, what are you driving at?"

After all, nobody knew very much about Joe except as they were thrown with him on the car and in and around the factory where they all worked. They knew that he had not been working at the factory more than a few months; and they had half an idea that he and his people had come from another state a day or so before Joe had taken up his work amongst them, though as a matter of fact nobody cared to know more than that Joe was a thoroughly good, whole-souled fellow, one who, judging

from his manner and his habits, was beyond question a "saver." They did know, however — and that for a certainty — that he lived farther down the car line than any of the men of the factory out that way, probably in or near Bleakdale, for he was always on the car mornings when it made its first corner stop to let on two brothers living what was thought to be a good ways down the line, taking it from the factory in the "West End."

Once about three weeks ago, before these two brothers and fellow workmen had come to their getting off place, Joe had left the car hurriedly, while still within the outskirts of the city, and had rushed to meet a young lady on the sidewalk, evidently there with no other purpose than awaiting him. But this had occurred only the one time. Always before and since Joe remained behind in the car when they themselves alighted. Whether or not it was his custom to meet young ladies on his way home from work, whether it was his custom to meet a certain young lady some where along the way, they could not say. All they knew about it was they had seen him leave the car that once. It told on its face value for just what it was worth. They had seen him get off the car that once and go to meet a young lady unknown to either of them.

But "that once" had occasioned endless and

searching conjecture, especially among those who were not "savers." It was surreptitiously circulated, even among the girls at the factory, that friend "Joe" had seriously under consideration the project of transforming himself into a benedict.

"It might have been his sister, for all you know about it," one of the younger of the women had advanced apologetically. She was rather pretty and much preferred to have young men safe under the protecting guidance of obliging sisters unless, perchance, she should be the one to receive little attentions.

"Yes, and it might have been his grandmother," some one had retorted, teasingly.

That evening on their way home from the factory, if the two brothers who had that first time noticed and remarked upon their fellow-worker's interest in a young woman standing expectantly by the roadside as the car came along, had but remained in the car and ridden on to the next stop past their own, they would have seen a repetition of the incident that had caused them mildly to wonder; for Joe, well they knew, was certainly not one to put himself out to the extent of getting off a car to walk unless there was some special reason for it.

"I've been waiting for twenty minutes or more, Joe," complained Emma, as he joined her

and they began to walk on in the direction of the rapidly receding car, toward Bleakdale. "Was the car late?"

"It may have been a little," vouchsafed Joe breezily, "but very likely your clock at home needs a little fixing. I guess you started out a little too early."

"I didn't start out at all," began Emma enigmatically. "I haven't been home yet. I walked from school and stopped into Kemble's to wait until time to go down to the tree where I've always waited for you. It was their clock, I guess."

"But yours is off too, because last night I looked particular at your clock just before I left your house, and when I got home ours was twenty minutes slower. And I allowed myself exactly fifteen minutes for the walk," concluded Joe with accuracy.

"Well, then, if you think it's off you can regulate it when you come up. Pa don't pay much attention to the clock since he's been laid up. But the doctor says Monday sure his arm will be all right and he can go to work, so it'll be just as well to have the clock right, though he always hears his factory whistle easy unless the wind's blowing strong the other way." Then Emma continued confidentially: "It'll be awfully nice to have Pa out of the house through the day. Someway or other he seems

to get on Ma's nerves something fierce. She says he 'worries' her. I wonder if I'll ever worry anybody," she queried aimlessly.

"You'll worry that mother of yours if we don't hurry along," ejaculated Joe practically. "Let's walk faster."

"I was just a-wondering whether I'll *always* be 'a-worrying' Ma," she asked demurely, and then a trifle coquettishly, "do you think any one else will ever want me around to worry them?"

They walked on in silence.

"I was eighteen day before yesterday," she volunteered after a little, with some show of spirit.

"Do you think your ma would be very much more worried if she had *two* men around the house instead of just one?" he inquired with marked hesitancy.

She gave him one look. Though it was dusk she caught a gleam in his eye that flashed into the very depths of her own spirit and then —

It was quite pitch-dark when the lovers reached home, and Mrs. Simpkins was out on the "courtesy porch," looking this way and that, up and down the road, skywards even, as though she thought possibly her eldest child might have been transfigured.

"Here they are, Pa," she called, very much relieved, as Joe and Emma made their appear-

ance as two dark somethings down at the gate. She rushed down the steps and down the path to meet them. "My goshen! Dearie me! I was worried," she exclaimed nervously, all in a flutter, "until I see you was with her, Joe." Then with confidence, "But I ain't goin' to worry no more."

"Thanks," said Joe, feeling in some way or other complimented, and he kissed Mrs. Simkins a rousing smack square on the lips, dark as it was.

Mrs. Simkins wondered for sometime that night how Joe Kuntz had acquired such skill and precision in matters osculatory.

"But I haint goin' to *worry* no more," she finally remembered. Then she rolled over and dropped off into deep slumber.

Doubtless through some sympathetic influence the others of the Simkins household rested more quietly that night and the following morning awakened more than usually refreshed.

CHAPTER V

DRESSMAKING: PREPARATIONS

May had seen several hot days, but Mrs. Simkins had not yet got around to the work of renovating the bargain lawn for the new dress, though the brightness and bleaching power of the intense sun could not have in any way fallen short of her requirements. There seemed to be plenty of time on hand. Original plans had missed their mark as originals have a way of doing in certain poorly regulated families.

Emma for reasons best known to herself, reasons which though urged strongly to do so she refused pertinaciously to divulge, had altered all her ideas and desires about the party she was to give. It could not now very well be called a birthday party — save arbitrarily — for her birthday, her eighteenth, was an event already several days buried in the dead past; it should not be a "class" party, for, though she should invite the members of her class and they could come or not as they chose, there were others that she wished to include among her guests, some outsiders, many of them

much older than was she herself. The presence of these would preclude styling the function a "class" party. Moreover, the date for the giving of the affair was to be postponed until the evening of June first instead of some time near the middle of May.

Emma persisted in refusing to give a reason for altering her ideas as to what she considered a fitting day for her party. She did, however, advance the veiled excuse that, as the season had been late anyway, the party might as well be a little far along too. This change of date fell in with Mrs. Simkins' opinion about the matter too, for she knew that by the day decided upon by Emma, June first, there would be quite a bit more lucre in the family till. Mr. Simkins had been working steadily since he began that Monday morning now over a week ago, and though some of the cash had gone skyward in well-defined wreaths and shadowy wraiths of bluish white smoke — for pa was smoke-hungry — enough had found its way into Mrs. Simkins' keep to make her, with the certainty of more soon, feel that they, the family, would before long be on an easy financial footing. Debts there were to pay, but that was only a sign that people had confidence in them. The debts could wait a while longer.

Commencement, of course, would not be until June eighth and Mrs. S. would try to squeeze

out of that week between the party and the graduation exercises enough money to buy Emma a narrow sash of white satin ribbon to wear with the lawn and brighten it up some. To be sure, she did not know whether or not it would be just appropriate or "in," as the woman at the store had said of laces; but she did know they wore ribbon sashes when she was a girl, and she did know a sash would alter the appearance of the dress which had of necessity to be worn first at the June party, and therefore would be likely to stand in need of a little touching up.

The girls had been in regular attendance at their classes and Emma had been more and more preoccupied as the final term of her school work drew to its close. Even Mrs. Jacobs, to whom she was as a matter largely of sentiment almost feudally attached in part because of a friendly leniency in anything touching rent and its prompt payment, could never any more get Emma to do any of the little tasks which it had been her custom, by way of accommodation, heretofore to perform in her spare moments. The preparation of her commencement essay was her ready excuse for not doing the little things she was expected to do, and this excuse stood her in good stead in more than one instance.

Her mother, though, had confided under seal

of secrecy — when at last she got it settled in her mind that Emma's dress must be bleached and made up and so had gone down the street to Mrs. Jacobs to borrow the "slim" pattern — that Emma's time seemed to be considerably more taken up with "sayin'" than with "essayin'."

"Do you know, Mrs. Jacobs, she just sits and talks by the hour evenin' after evenin' with that Joe. He's been kind a-sweet on her ever since that Christmas tree social last year at our church. They spend so much time talkin', low-like, that when she's goin' to get that essay composed I can't for the life of me make out. I've heard tell you can buy 'em already writ out if you want to. Maybe Joe's gone and bought her one, and that's why she seems so satisfied and lazy all the while. Joe's got money. He makes his two a day, and he says he would do anything for Emma. I hope if he buys her an essay, I hope he'll just get her a good one with a whole lot of high-falutin' words and gestures like a windmill put in. I would feel so proud." Mrs. S. enjoyed in anticipation the efforts of her firstborn.

But Mrs. Simkins could stay but a moment in spite of Mrs. Jacobs' urging.

"No, thank you, I've got to get back and get the dinner on the stove," she had to insist at last. "I'll be glad when vacation comes

and the girls are out of school. Maybe Myra can help you some then if you need anybody. But as for Emma — I don't know — like as not she'll have another essay on hand, or a po'm." There was just a shade of insinuation in the remark, and both women laughed merrily as they parted.

"I want to be there when Em begins that po'm," Mrs. Jacobs called from her porch.

Mrs. Simkins, already at the gate, turned for a moment and gaily waved the borrowed pattern toward the porch in an understanding farewell.

Mrs. Simkins hurried up the street to her plain little house, paintless well-nigh, and glancing at the clock, recently regulated by Joe's skillful hand and therefore correct, found she still had plenty of time to get dinner before the girls came home to sit down to their noonday fare. So she thought, as the sun was such a blaze of heat, she would try to get the lawn dress goods out on the grass to bleach. Taking just a bit of soft soap from her crock full in the cellar, she made a heavy white suds in a small quantity of hot water, and this suds she turned into her tub already half filled with warm water, mixing thoroughly the while. Then laying the lawn in folds to fit the tub and placing it in the soapy water, she left it there to soak.

"I guess I'll just let it soak all night," she

finally decided. "Tomorrow's sure to be a proper twin to today, and I can just take it over to Mrs. Brown's after I rinse it good and let her bleach it on her grass plat. It's bigger'n our'n anyway and grassier, too. Em need never know but what I bought it just that way at the store. I know, after I get it pressed, she nor nobody else could ever tell but what it lay just that way on the counter. But Em don't take no interest in it somehow. It's been in my bureau drawer ever since that night."

And so Mr. Simkins after laying a molding-board over the washtub, and attempting to disguise the situation slightly by placing a couple of pie tins, a flour sifter and a rolling-pin atop, went complacently to the work of paring potatoes and in other ways getting things in order for dinner.

"I'm glad today 's only Wednesday," she said to herself; then, with a woman's remarkable quickness in figuring things out, "tomorrow 's Thursday," she calculated. "The girls'll be gone all day if I put them up a nice lunch and tell them it's too awful hot to come home right in the heat of the day. That'll fix it just right. Mrs. Brown'll help me bleach and press that dress goods if I let her think she's doin' it all. Even My'll never know there was any need of a bit of soap and a May day sun. Em's so squeamish. No tellin' what she would

do if she suspected. I'll just ask Mrs. B.'s advice about the whole business, and I shouldn't be at all surprised if she sailed right in and did the whole thing for me offhand. Mrs. B.'s a splendid one at ironin'," Mrs. Simkins added meditatively, "and I'm certainly not goin' to hang back when it comes to lettin' her show what she can do. My oh me! That woman does like to have things her own way!"

Dinner was ready when the girls came home, so the three of them sat down immediately.

"Your pa took his lunch with him this mornin'," explained Mrs. S., as they took their places. "It's pretty far for him to walk such warm days. He has to walk so fast, you know. And tomorrow I'm goin' to put up your lunch, too. It's blazin' hot to hurry around so much."

Myra as usual helped to clear off the table, though the dishwashing was left for Mrs. Simkins' afternoon leisure, as a sort of diversion, presumably. But then Myra really had no time unless there happened to be no afternoon session.

"Are you going to make pies, Mother?" inquired Myra, scenting a little extra for Thursday's luncheon basket.

Mrs. Simkins skimmed lightly over the interrogation with a request.

"Come, My," she asked of her younger daughter, offsetting curiosity, "come, I want

you to help me hold up this pattern I borrowed off of Mrs. Jacobs so as I can get some idea as to how it's goin' to fit Em."

"Has Mrs. Jacobs got her cambric finished?" asked Emma absently, as she dreamily arose to be measured.

"She's got it cut out," stuttered Mrs. S., six pins in her mouth somewhat interfering with her enunciation.

Emma, doubtless, was wondering if the cambric would be worn at her party. Her mind seemed to be anywhere rather than upon what her sister and her mother were doing with Mrs. Jacob's paper pattern.

"Em's so lifeless about some things it's enough to worry a person," said Mrs. Simkins to her spouse that night as they were about to retire.

"That essay's on her mind, Ma, depend upon it," and Mr. Simkins dismissed any hint of anxiety whatsoever from his tired brain and slept.

CHAPTER VI

DRESSMAKING: ACTUALITIES

Bright and early the next morning Mrs. Simkins got her husband and her daughters off, one across field paths to his work at the only factory near Bleakdale, the others on the car to school, all with lunches nicely put up and as inviting in variety of viands as her none too plentifully supplied purse would permit.

They had all awakened more than usually near the sun's time for appearing above the horizon that morning, the birds' joyous welcoming of the four o'clock dawn, warm and brilliant, having been a little more clamorous than previously that season, so much so that no one of the family could think of sleeping, though Emma would perhaps have lain dozing, but half awake, indefinitely — for her slumber had been somewhat troubled and broken in a sub-conscious going over of plans for the morrow — had not her sister, quite beside her usual self, given her several vigorous tugs by her feet, not at all in her accustomed character, infected, doubtless, by the spirit of the early morning

electrifying all under its influence into new energy and unwonted height of spirit.

"Come on, Em! Out you go, lazy!" My had called, pulling mischievously with quite a show of strength the while; and Em surprised and not a little angry at first at her sister's out-of-the-ordinary behavior, had reluctantly allowed herself to be persuaded to forego her little cat-nap and to be talked into attiring herself for the enjoyment of the rare early morning hours for breakfast and for school.

"I guess I'll have to thank you after all, My, for getting me out so early," Emma had admitted with some hesitancy and just a shade of inexplicable bashfulness as they sat at breakfast.

Emma disliked ever to admit herself to be in the wrong: her attitude toward her sister, gentle and unselfish as she in her heart knew her sister to be, had always been one of conscious superiority with a sort of under-current idea that she was there for no other purpose than to be good-naturedly imposed upon and conveniently run over (figuratively) whenever advantageous to do so.

"I'm so put out with myself (glances of incredulity had flashed amusedly among the other members of the family), you see, I didn't sleep well all night kind of half-dreaming about it; and here, if it hadn't been for My, I'd never

have been up to do it, I was that drowsy and done out."

"And now since you *are* up," Mrs. Simkins had offered, handing meanwhile a second cup of coffee to the husband and father, "let's hear why you were so very particular about gettin' up so early."

"Why, I've got to get off for school on the first car down this morning. It's a good thing I got my breakfast in time and my lunch put up."

"My word! That essay!" Mrs. S. had sympathizingly remarked, instinctively picturing to herself an early morning rehearsal with teachers, taking everything — reasons included — for granted. "I told Mrs. Jacobs yesterday when I was down there to borrow that pattern that I wished Joe would just go and buy you a nice 'propriate essay with gesture directions; then you wouldn't have to fuss around so and worry nights and everything. They didn't have graduatin' essays in my day; but I've heard enough since about buyin' 'em. I just want you to ask Joe to go and get you one." Mrs. Simkins had given her opinion with finality.

"Maybe that's why Joe wanted me to take the early car. He didn't just explain what he was going to do."

"Oh! It's Joe, is it? I thought it was one

of them professor teachers wanted to see you. Well, you just tell Joe you can't be late for school. And you almost through all of it!" Mrs. Simkins had commanded with warmth, and then: "My's to go on the early car, too. When young folks go spookin' off at daybreak it's just as well to have some one else along snoopin'."

Thus it was that even before six o'clock Mrs. Simkins found herself absolute master of her entire house and of her time until nightfall. Though the girls had never before taken the early car for the city, rarely, in fact, being up in time to do so even had they cared to, the unusualness of the hour at which they had set out did not seem to occupy her thoughts to any marked extent. Her knowledge of the city and its complexities was not full enough to enable her to picture what might possibly happen to two young girls out in the hustle and bustle and hurry of the city streets even in the "East End," out in the rush of the early morning hours when so many rush hither and thither to their various employments.

Could she have known that Emma had, after all her admonition and injunction, appeared in her classroom fully an hour late; could she have known that Myra, ordered to the platform by an implacable instructor, judgment-day vengeance in his eye, had suffered the humiliation

of a few terse remarks and some heartfelt advice, eminently suited to impress upon her the flagrant enormity of living a lifetime with that cornerstone of character, punctuality, cracked and shamefully chipped; could she have known that Joe Kuntz had been for the first time in his factory experience "docked" a round fifty cents' worth of silver for tardiness equivalent in value to the factory management; could she have known all this, Mrs. Simkins might have dropped bodily with her whole soul and all her existences in the spirit into her old habit "worry."

But she knew naught of it all, and so serenely and contentedly she manipulated the lawn in an effort to rid it of as much soapy water (by this time tinged a shade dark) as she could wring from it without endangering the evenness of the weave, in order that she might lay it aside and refill the tub with warm rinsing water.

Mrs. Simkins was not an adept at reasoning; she would have been quite at sea even as to a hazy meaning of the term had any one mentioned *logic* in her hearing. So she was quite incapable of drawing a little lesson from the peculiar set of circumstances surrounding the movements of her daughters early that morning. Later, when but a few weeks had passed, she knew all just as it had happened, and in the telling she was the one of all that merry

crowd of listeners who laughed loudest and longest; yet could she have known aught of it beforehand "worry" would have plucked and pulled, would have nagged and plagued her despite her resolution, into such a state that she might have suspected herself, and with reason, guilty of the "unforgivable sin," for who is there to say persistent worry is not just that, narrowing, unnerving, demoralizing as it certainly is.

But Joe and Emma were far too interested to disclose what they knew, and Myra — Myra was discreet; more than that, she was thoroughly loyal in whatever she was bound by her true nature to consider solely the concern of others.

So Mrs. Simkins, ignorant of all and worryless, continued in peace with the renovation of the goods for her daughter's dress, lifting it and sousing it again and again in the warm rinse water till every trace of soap, even the slight odor, had been completely removed.

By eight o'clock she knew that the Brown household would have quieted down; the husband having long since gone off to his work at the factory, the same one in which Mr. Simkins himself earned the support — or such as went under that name — of his family; the children, a couple of boys and a girl, having somewhat later passed down the street on the way to the village school before the door of

which they were due, the girl included, for a game of marbles; and the baby — well she would make it her part of the work, thought Mrs. Simkins, to take care of baby while Mrs. Brown demonstrated what she could do along the line of making bargain material look just like new. To be sure, though she had thought about the matter several days, she had not yet got around to inquire whether Mrs. Brown would be otherwise engaged and unable to assist her, or whether she would be quite free, with plenty of time on her hands. Yet knowing Mrs. Brown as she did, thoroughly, with the viscid intimacy of small places, she felt — was sure in truth — that Mrs. B. would rush gladly with a helping hand (or two of them) to offer whatever assistance lay within her power to grant.

So having rinsed to a sufficiency the length of lawn, Mrs. Simkins made her way up the street to the house and home of that neighbor among neighbors, the one with the spirit of accommodation and good will writ in strong though smiling lines over her entire countenance, registered indelibly in the minds of the many to whom she had been a friend in need.

Mrs. Brown was out on the only porch, which by the way happened to be a front one, bathing the baby when through the splashing of the water in the tub — for the child was a three-year-old and vigorous, not to say unmanageable

— she chanced to spy Mrs. Simkins through the leafy barrier of the half-grown maples along the street, evidently making her way to no other house than hers.

As Mrs. Simkins turned in at the gate, the bunch of still dripping white goods which she was holding carefully away from her caught Mrs. Brown's eye. She at once, in that masterly though rather disagreeable fashion some have, settled almost intuitively on the reason for the early morning visit (though such were not extraordinary in Bleakdale) and immediately, as was her custom, she voiced what was in her mind without query or further hesitation.

"You've brought over some goods to bleach on my grass," she stated, disdaining, at least neglecting, to question about the matter. "Em's dress, I'll bet a dollar. Now you jest set right down and watch baby a minute, and I'll spread the goods out on the best bit of grass there is in the whole plat."

Unhesitatingly she reached for the cloth as Mrs. Simkins dropped on the step near the tub of water. Mrs. S. knew Mrs. B. so well. They had been the greatest of friends, thick as mud for over *two* years.

"All right. Go on. You know more about your tormented old grass than I do, I guess," she agreed and admitted all in a breath, and

then as though to make herself equally useful, "I'll dry baby and dress her," she volunteered.

The goods was going to take up a stretch of grass longer than Mrs. Brown had planned to have it; so she had to relay it, turning one end back upon itself in order to have enough grass right in the hottest place without a bit of shade.

"Ain't you afraid that turned over place'll look darker than the rest?" came from the porch.

Without parley came back peremptorily, "You jest tend to that baby. I'm goin' to make this cloth do jest what I want it to. I'll turn and change that place, and sprinkle the whole thing again as soon as it dries. By one it'll be through. And you're goin' to stay to dinner. Get that?"

"Suits me." Mrs. S. fell in with the suggestion so domineeringly expressed. "The folks all took their lunches anyway, and I'm all alone."

"'Twouldn't make no difference. You'd have to stay anyway to watch me press this cloth — to see if I know how to do it right," Mrs. B. added with mild sarcasm.

"You hain't goin' to press it," Mrs. S. speciously objected. "I didn't come over here to get your help; I come over for your grass," she offered tactfully and drawingly.

"What do I care? I guess I jest enjoy pressin' nice, soft, white goods like this here'll be when the sun and me gets through. I'm goin' to press it anyway," and she set her foot down hard, as though that was all there was to be said about it.

"Can't I watch, even?" playfully inquired Mrs. S.

"No," with finality. "You're to give the baby her nap. It won't take me no time at all soon's we eat." Then she added, "And no feelings, Mrs. S.; but I'm a-thinkin' I can press better'n you anyway."

"Oh, no feelings," agreed Mrs. S. smiling, "and I'll see that the baby goes to sleep nice and quiet, the little dear. But there's one thing, Kate Brown," she went on seriously, "neither Emma nor Myra is to know anything about this bleachin' and pressin'. I ain't told them the goods was soiled and I'm not goin' to — so there!" and her eyes snapped.

Telling tales out of school, however, was not one of Mrs. Brown's failings.

Dinner over, Mrs. Brown went out to see if the goods were ready for pressing, and Mrs. Simkins retired to her friend's bedroom with the baby. There the child, in consideration of being allowed to pull Mrs. Simkins' front hair back and forth rhythmically while Mrs. S. hummed raspingly, went soundly to sleep in less

than ten minutes, leaving Mrs. S. to sit looking out of the bedroom window at the pretty yard and the trolley wires beyond.

Before the baby awakened in came Mrs. Brown, tiptoeing.

"The goods is did up beautiful," she exulted. "Now you can go right home and get that pattern — Milly Franks said you'd borrowed it off of Mrs. Jacobs — and we'll have that dress cut out and basted before four o'clock."

"Well, I've got to be back home by five to begin supper," bandied Mrs. S., knowing well that Mrs. B. enjoyed the appearance of opposition, though not real obstinacy.

"Hurry along with you. Stop your gab, and you'll get there in time, all right," Mrs. B. counseled with characteristic warmth.

True to the estimation Mrs. B. had placed upon her own abilities as a dressmaker of quickness and dispatch, Mrs. S. found herself just a little before five o'clock back in her own home, the lawn dress for Emma's June day party and afterwards for her commencement already cut out and tentatively basted.

"And it's goin' to be handsome when I get that pretty lace on," Mrs. S. had said, as Mrs. B. held the lightly thrown together garment up to her to get some idea (a faint one) as to how the skirt was going to hang. "I wish Emma

wouldn't wear it to her party. That dimity of hern's plenty good, and she could save this for her commencement."

"Now you know you don't mean anything of the kind," had overruled Mrs. Brown with keener reasoning. "At the party they'll see her close as can be, at the graduatin' all the class'll be so flustered they won't know what's goin' on; and not five people in the aujence will know her from Eve anyway. I guess you can freshen it up some, can't you?" Then reconsidering, "the light *is* awful bright at commencement."

"I was thinkin' of buyin' a ribbon sash if I can make to rake together enough after the party," Mrs. S. had confided.

"Land sakes, Jul Simkins! Here we've been talkin' party and party as though I knew all about it; and goodness me! this is the first I've heard of it," had ejaculated Mrs. Brown. "But I suspected enough to almost know," she had concluded, and then as a sort of hearty good-by, as Mrs. Simkins turned at the gate, "of course, I'll be asked to come over."

The girls came home shortly after Mrs. S. began to peel the potatoes for supper and to set the table. Both were late, for Myra had been asked to remain to make up a certain lesson, and Emma as though with a feeling of culpability, contritely elected to await Myra's release from discipline, so that they both could

ride home together on the car and talk it over, And this they accordingly did, constructing as they rode along, at a single stroke, a "worry" assuager of plausibility for their mother's ears and a conscience balm for their own brains.

In addition Myra planned to divert her mother's attention from the tardiness of their homecoming by a judicious little bit of fault-finding; for she knew her mother would spend the following hour or two trying to justify herself—so high were her ideals of mother-duty.

"There wasn't a bit of pie in that lunch," she complained as soon as she had made her way into the kitchen.

"I know there wasn't," Mrs. Simkins agreed easily, quite out of her customary way.

"Heavens!" thought Myra, "is Mother getting emancipated?"

"But there's a lot of thread in Em's new dress. Mrs. Brown helped me with it all and that'll save you just so much." Then she added (whatever had got into Mother?) with quite a show of self-satisfaction and an inward titter: "Don't think of pie, My, every time you see a flour sifter laid out. Don't you know some people use 'em for strainers?"

Myra went down to the gate to await her father's return from work.

"Ma's gettin' real light-headed," she mentally commented.

CHAPTER VII

A WALK AND A TALK

After the supper things had been cleared away and the dishes had been washed so that Myra could assist, Mrs. Simkins had Emma slip off her dress and stand up — and she complied, though reluctantly — while the new garment with its preliminary bastings could be tried on and altered a trifle here and there as it might stand in the need of a little taking in or a little letting out.

"You'll have to hurry up about it, Ma. You know Joe's a-coming for me at half-past seven. We're going over to Lottie Johnson's for a little walk." Emma was fidgety and impatient and nervous still from her peculiar experiences of the morning.

"Oh, yes! And a little talk! Hold still now while I see if this wants to be taken up a little on the shoulder seams. Seems it does," she voiced her decision, squinting one eye and indulging in a bit of cheap wit. "Now, My, the pins," and she filled one corner of her mouth. But there was another corner, happily, and from this she continued to give vent to occa-

sional directions to My as she ripped bastings and pinned anew wherever the "fit" of the dress failed to coincide with her views as to how it should look.

But as Mrs. Simkins had said, Emma was in point of fact about Mrs. Jacobs' size, and so the borrowed pattern had answered very well. Only a few alterations were necessary; there are always some.

"That's finished," at last announced Mrs. Simkins. "Now, Em, stand up on this hassock and I'll *card* you."

"What's that, Ma?" Myra wanted to know.

"A body would think we never had a 'slim' dress in the house before to hear you talk," returned Mrs. S. raspingly. "Now you just watch me. Your ma'll show you what *cardin'* is. Get up on the hassock, Em," she commanded.

Emma obeyed, glancing sidelong at the clock.

"Hurry up with you, Ma," she uttered impatiently. "It's almost seven-thirty."

"Just you wait," soothingly urged Mrs. S. "We'll soon be done now, so don't fret. This pattern says the skirt must hang free just four inches from the floor all around even-like. Now, Myra, you cut me a card just —"

"Why didn't you say you wanted to make the skirt straight around the bottom?" Myra was a little disgusted, the more since she had

not yet figured out what her mother had meant her to understand about the flour sifter a while before.

"I'm going out on the porch with Pa," she said without offering to help hang the skirt, and somewhat offended.

But the skirt got hung, nevertheless; for Myra, though an interesting and useful mite of humanity, was far from being indispensable.

Mrs. S. fixed everything about the dress just as she wanted it, or thought she wanted it; then Emma got down off the hassock, and again glancing at the clock, found it was still not quite time for Joe to come for her. She lifted the soft white from the chair across the back of which her mother had thrown it for the moment, and with more interest than she had at any time taken in it she asked:

"Do you think it is going to be pretty, Mother?"— she always used "Mother" when talking seriously, for it seemed more dignified, more befitting one about to be graduated, on the whole, less abrupt to her than just curt "Ma"— and then almost with ardor, "I do want it to look soft and white and beautiful and — and pure," she added so meaningly that her mother looked up quickly from where she sat trying to wheedle an unmanageable thread into

the eye of a needle where it doubtless knew all the time it by rights ought to be.

"Here, Em," she cut short all sentiment without mercy; "here, you thread this needle for your Ma, and she'll guarantee you'll look like the virgin queen."

Joe came shortly after and waited a while on the step to talk with Pa Simkins and My until Emma had got into her old dress again. Then leaving Mrs. Simkins sewing in the alterations on the new one and planning as to how the lace was going to be put on, the two passed through Pa's tobacco whiffs on down the path.

"Ma don't seem to worry so much as she used to," Emma wonderingly remarked to Joe as he took her arm and they turned through the gateway to the path alongside the road.

"It ain't because your pa has given up smoking, I know that much," Joe laughed lightly.

"I think it is because Pa's working again for one thing, and then the winter was trying for all of us, Ma most of all," Emma reasoned and then meditatively continued: "Ma always did worry a great deal. Things didn't always go to suit her, and I guess in a way it's been a case of ideals with her. Lately, you know, things seem to be going her way and that has brightened her." After a little, as Joe seemed to cherish silence, Emma observed pedantically

with the serious turn eighteen often affects: "There's nothing like a little encouragement to cheer a person up."

"I guess I cheered her up some that night I kissed her." Joe smiled, remembering that night of nights and its abandon.

"I admit you're both cheery and cheering," Emma agreed appreciatively, "but I'm not in the least down-hearted nor — see the stars, Joe," she changed the subject abruptly; maybe she knew Joe's sympathetic turns —"that big one over there's Mars. We've been looking over our astronomy a little at the 'High.' It makes a body just want to sail up in a cloud boat and float from star to star — from star to star the weepy clouds among. The big glowing ones, Joe, I mean. Those little points of brilliant, flashy light, they're suns. Couldn't sit long there —"

"I've been thinking lately, myself, I'd like to live at 'Mar's,'" interrupted Joe artfully, with borrowed pronunciation, "and as for *sons*, bright ones —"

But Emma headed him off, and for the rest of the walk wouldn't let him utter a single word, telling him he must not be too liberal with his castles in Spain, nor yet depend quite on "Mar's."

CHAPTER VIII

MAKING A PARTY SUIT THE SEASON

Time was at last fast on its way toward the first of June. Preparations for the June day party were already completed or nearly so, for preparations never are, or rarely are, fully prepared, there always being a little to occupy the final moment even of such hosts and hostesses as were to be met with, though at long intervals, in Bleakdale, far from elaborate though such preparations were.

The dress which had caused Mrs. Simkins so much concern in planning the "ways and means" of its purchase, in its selection, and in its making, now lay in a long pasteboard box Joe had got for it down town, finished and satisfactory to all in every detail. It was light, almost filmy — for it had been starched but a trifle — beautiful with its little insertions and edgings of pretty though cheap lace; at least, so it looked to the Simkins family, even to Mr. Simkins himself, from whose hand Myra adroitly removed the cigar before she would permit him to enter its almost sacred presence.

Mrs. Jacobs had been asked to come up and admire the product of her paper pattern, and Mr. Jacobs tagged along, though he had not been to the Simkins house since the accident of weeks ago. He was not so active as his wife, who was said to be some years younger.

Mrs. Brown, too, popped in breezily about noon of Decoration Day on her way home from the exercises near the "East End" high school building, for Bleakdale, dormant little village, was too dead itself to plan to remember the nation's dead.

"It *is* a beauty. I knew it would be when I helped your ma — cut it out." Mrs. Brown remembered in time that half-truths are in some instances the very blessings of the gods. "But, Em," she went on obstinately, "dotted mull would ha' looked scrumptious. You're a wee bit scrawny anyway, and the dots would ha' filled you out kind a' like without spoilin' the style."

What pleased Mrs. Simkins most of all was that Emma herself really and truly seemed to think the dress almost too pretty to wear. She was delighted with it. Whether because of this or for some deeper reason, all the old taciturnity, the old lack of interest and of appreciation seemed to have left her, and she became a happy, sweetly satisfied young woman. Thoughts of how she was to look when attired

in her new gown were evidently flashing through her imagination.

"Oh! I'll just make the loveliest little —" she unconsciously uttered, finishing with a blush as her mother interposed with forceful slang:

"Come, Em! Don't go and get stuck on yourself. There'll be plenty to call you lovely if you give 'em a chance. Don't begin the procession yourself, else maybe you won't hear very many footfalls a-pad-paddin' along behind."

"There'll be Joe, anyway, no matter what I do or say," answered Emma loyally, a little nettled to think her mother had caught her inadvertently voiced self-adulation.

"Humph! Joe!" commented Mrs. S. with mild contempt, as though Joe, after all, were hardly worth counting as one to be depended on. "I didn't see him put in an appearance last night."

"Because I told him not to come. We were going to be so busy."

"*We* busy!" sniffed Mrs. S. Then after a moment, latent affection upwelling, "There, there, Em, my dear, I know you've had more on your hands than you could attend to. Essays must be awful tryin' things. If you'd only took my advice it would have saved you that much worry."

But the dress was made, anyway, and presumably the essay likewise was finished, for Emma's spirits had certainly been on the rise; although to be sure there was still a full week after the party in which to prepare, since commencement was not until the eighth.

It being a holiday, Joe came up in the afternoon rather late, and the two walked out together across the fields in a sort of romantic ramble toward a brook and the cooling shade of a group of trees near by, back, far back, from the straight lines of houses on each side of the dusty Bleakdale turnpike, and from the clash-clashing and the rumble of the trolley cars on their way back and forth, to and from the city.

It was dark when they returned, and Mrs. S. with maybe a slight return attack of her old trouble, was down at the gate, not looking for them, just standing there as though there was no place in the whole world like a gate post on which to lean one's head in quiet and profitable meditation. She asked Joe in to supper; but he excused himself, saying he was in a hurry. As he turned to continue on his way down the street, she heard him say, as though casually, to Emma that he would have everything arranged. Woman like — and man like, too — she wondered what.

Verbal invitations for the evening of June first had several days since been given to

Emma's classmates, to the Jacobs, the Browns, the three or four families living close by, and to two or three a ways down the car line. Mrs. Simkins had made a special request that Mrs. Jones, the clerk who had been so kind to her in helping her select the lawn dress goods, be asked to come, and Joe had managed it so that a few of his friends would be present. All that there remained to do was to prepare the refreshments for the guests, to make a few final moves toward putting the house in order, and to go out and find some flowers for decorating. As there was plenty of time for all of this on the morrow, the Simkins family retired as usual shortly after the clock struck nine.

The hour of awakening the morning of the party was just about the same as that some mornings previously when departure on the first car down toward the city seemed a vital feature of the day. This morning, too, the birds kept up an endless chattering, in part a joyous heralding of the dawn, and then in its persistent prolongation doubtless, little love messages sung operatically from mate to mate or else between certain of the feathered chorus intending soon to perfect as yet only whispered interesting plans they had in mind for the future.

The daybreak symphony served in every way as an alarm to be heeded or to be disregarded

as each of the family chose. They did not always pay attention to the very early call. This morning to be filled so full of pleasant tasks — for the Simkins once having made up their minds to the money side of the affair hospitably threw themselves whole-souled into anything and everything required of them to make it a success — all, even Emma, paid immediate and good-natured compliance to the harmonious summons of the birds.

There was much to do in the kitchen in way of preparation, and Mrs. Simkins wanted to get at it early so that the house might be put in as spick and span order as the somewhat worn condition of the house furnishings would admit.

"Pa might have had that rocker he broke last winter fixed up," Mrs. S. had said to Emma just the day before. "We need another one to put on the lawn out by the porch, but your pa says he's had enough of the old thing. Wouldn't have it fixed if he had a lot on Wall Street to sell. He don't want to see it no more. It's too bad," she went on regretfully, "'cause maybe some of 'em 'll enjoy the air better 'n they will the house "— by which Mrs. S. did not by any means intend to convey the idea that her house was without air.

So very likely reasoning that nicely gotten up refreshments, though of necessity limited in variety, might make up for any deficiency either

in quantity or in elegance of furniture, Mrs. S., accompanied by her capable assistant, Myra, betook herself soon after breakfast to the kitchen in which they began, and in due course of time brought to delectable culmination, divers siftings, mixings, beatings, stirrings.

"It's a good thing Decoration Day came on Friday, for that gave us a whole day extra," said Myra thankfully.

"You could ha' staid at home for once. You'd ha' had to; there wouldn't ha' been any other side to it," answered Mrs. S. with a duty-first expression.

Just then Emma burst enthusiastically into the kitchen where her mother and sister were working.

"I've got it! Oh, I've got it!" she exclaimed ecstatically, dancing around half like a lunatic.

Mrs. S. looked at Myra understandingly.

"She's got it," she passed on the remark mockingly and chant-like, for Emma since breakfast had sat wrapped in thought without offering to turn her hand over to do a thing. "And what have you got, my pretty lady?" she enquired ironically; then as though fully half convinced, "a hook-worm?"

"O Mother! Just the loveliest idea," corrected Emma, not in the least perturbed.

"About what, may I ask?"

"About our decorations for the rooms and the tables and the little stands. I've got a color scheme all worked out. We'll have it pure yellow," she announced triumphantly. "I'm going to trim with dandelions. There aren't so many here; but there are thousands out through the meadows where Joe and I were walking yesterday. Such a — an *inspiration!*"

"I guess you're all right, Em." Mrs. Simkins restored her elder daughter to immediate favor, changed all at once by the brightness of the scene in her mind's eye. "They will be dandy, for a fact. Dandy Lions!

> "'Pretty little yellow heads,
> Blooming in great golden beds.
> Pluck will I just one round sun,
> Pluck a thousand ere I'm done!'

"You don't ever want to forget, girls, that your ma was educated 'afore she married your pa, and can quote poetry and such with the best of 'em. Only I've been hampered all my life," she went on sadly, reminiscently. "It takes a party like we're goin' to have to give me back my merry days and make me like I was when I was a chick of a woman like you two," and Mrs. Simkins began to hum softly to herself.

"Some woman, that!" commented Myra, mischievously.

"Now, My, quit that laughing. 'Tain't every day in the year that your ma's light-spirited. I can finish now by myself. You and Emma get your half-bushel baskets and fill 'em full of those jolly, little, sunny flowers." And Mrs. Simkins went busily on, humming contentedly to herself.

When the girls returned they had quantities of dandelions plucked with as long stems as they could possibly manage by forcing their fingers deep down into the leaves.

"We'll have to get some old tin cans and fill them with water for vases. There's only one vase in the house, and we can't use cups and glasses because we'll need them all for the lemonade," Emma decided as her mother came to the door to look at their burden of bloom.

"Cans'll do just as well. You can sort 'a droop some of them long-stemmed ones down over the sides, and that'll kind 'a hide the tin," agreed Mrs. S. optimistically.

It was far past the dinner hour, though the girls had been so busy they had not thought of eating, before the working out of what they rather largely styled their "color scheme" was completed. The effect as a whole would have appealed to any flower lover and to any admirer of industry, for a vast amount of work was represented.

Great masses of dandelions were arranged

here and there throughout the neat little cottage, several cans filled to overflowing with the flowers being placed closely together to give the effect of good sized bowls. They were massed in the center of the dining-room table; they were banked beneath the windows in the other rooms; they were placed on the porch in pretty groups; they even bordered the walk in golden yellow part way down the path to the fence. The girls had not gathered nearly enough, and found they had to return for more before the results met with their approval and that of their just as enthusiastic mother.

When all was done the girls ate, and their mother's work being over until time for the guests to arrive, they all seated themselves in the sitting-room to rest and to admire the striking success of their "color scheme."

"Ain't it just lovely! I feel as if I was enterin' the golden gate into heaven just to see them beautiful dandelions. Was it Ten'son, My, who wrote:

> 'Little gold drops, how I love you!
> How I want to hug and kiss you!
> Cook you, eat you, like a Sulu!
> Make my stomach learn jiu-jitsu!'"

"No, Ma, I don't just think it was," patiently disagreed Myra, her mother's kaleido-

scopic change of disposition was beginning to weigh upon her.

"Oh, never mind! Maybe I read it in that Sunday paper your pa brought home last week. I hain't seen much poetry since I was a young lady. It's this party excitement takes my mind back so. I hain't been so frisky in moons."

"And your geography, Ma, is off," persisted Myra unwilling to allow her mother to slip out of her errors on the easy plea of unwonted gayety of mood. "Your Golden Gate is in California. It's the pearly gates that's in heaven."

"I see *my* golden gate lookin' out at them cans of dandelions by the path," insisted Mrs. S. "'Tain't polite anyway to tell your ma she don't know nothin'," she admonished, still smiling.

And so wore on the afternoon. Mrs. Brown came over early, and shortly afterwards the Jacobs arrived and a few others. Myra and her mother had changed their clothes rather early; but Emma, not wishing to muss her new gown by attiring herself too soon, found she had to ask to be excused after these first few had reached the house in order to dress. By six o'clock almost all the guests had assembled; half an hour later they were all there, busily talking and laughing, save perhaps one who sat

sedately, almost stiffly, a little back from the center of the merry crowd.

Already had the lemonade been passed once as a sort of welcoming cup of cheer on the hot June night; already had Mrs. Brown, among all within the reach of her full-toned voice, circulated her deeply ingrained opinion concerning the relative merits of plain lawn and dotted mull as a material for a "graduatin'" dress, leaning most positively and unequivocally toward the latter; already had Mrs. Simkins searched for and found Mrs. Jones of the dry-goods store down in the city to tell her in detail all about the new dress and its making.

Just then Emma, who had had at last to have Myra called to assist her in getting into her frock and to arrange her hair, appeared at the stair door, and passing into the room, made her way from group to group, shaking hands with her guests and making them welcome all over again.

Mrs. Jones was admiring the dress as she passed around the room, looking at it intently, mentally making comparison between it and that of her daughter, off the same piece.

Emma finally came over her way and Mrs. S. proudly presented her to Mrs. Jones whom, of course, she had never before seen. Before leaving them Emma managed to whisper to her mother:

"Goodness me! Look at our beautiful 'color scheme'!"

And Mrs. S., turning, was horrified, then well-nigh stupefied, to see before her blank rows and groups of tin cans — some rusty, some bright, all jagged around the tops, even through the door into the dining-room glimmering at her from all sides.

"Land sakes! What has happened!" she exclaimed hysterically; and Mrs. Jones, fearing she was about to faint, supported her drooping form.

"They're all closed up, Ma! Every last dandelion's gone to sleep! Oh! why didn't *you* think? *You* might have known!" Emma was almost weeping, and rightly thought that age should have known better than to get youth into such straits. "Where's Joe?" she asked, as though Joe might instantaneously alleviate her embarrassment.

But Joe was out on the lawn with Pa Simkins, and Jacobs and some others; he was not to be easily and quietly called.

"We've just got to let on we wanted it that way. Lots of people have to let on about a good many things," sagely decided Mrs. S., recovering herself. "You just go quietly and call My, and have her take those awful lookin' cans off the dinin' table. The rest of 'em we'll just let go. We're not goin' to spoil the party

because your 'color scheme,' as you call it, hain't worked out." And Mrs. Simkins straightened with the manner of one who had on the spur of the moment, through sheer force of will, added yet another vertebra to her "backbone." She needed all the extra *backing* she could command, for the house which early in the evening had been really beautiful with its gilding of simple, dainty, yellow flowers, now looked bare and much like a caricature with its rows and groups of tin cans on tables, under window sills, even looking out the open door down each side of the path to the porch.

Myra was startled, and for a good moment could not grasp the situation, nor understand the meaning of what seemed to be a complete and lightning-like transformation. When she did take it all in, realizing fully what had occurred, attracting as little attention as possible, without a word — for three-fourths of the guests in all likelihood had never noticed there had been any "color scheme"; many would not have known a flower from a brickbat — she slipped the cans off the dining table and from other conspicuous places.

Emma wanted to assist, but felt that after having been so late in dressing, it would hardly do for her to absent herself even for a short time. Anyway, the shock of the discovery of the flowers' unfaithfulness over, thoughts of the

later hours of the evening and what they were to bring filled her mind. She very wisely looked only to the future; the future to which she looked did not lie, as with some, decades and decades away. Chancing to glance across the room she caught sight of the Reverend Mr. Seton who sat apart from the others, somewhat retired. To him she felt in a manner drawn, not so much for sympathy — for that she would not ask — as in sympathy.

There was to be no elaborate party supper: only a slice of beef-loaf, a spoonful of creamed potatoes, a couple of pieces of cake with a fork on a plate for each guest. They were to eat just wherever they happened to be standing or sitting, although there were several little tables convenient for those who might wish to use them.

On each plate, neatly folded under the fork — presumably placed there by a trusted friend, for though Mrs. S. saw to filling the plates, she knew nothing of it all — was a slip of paper. Some curiously inclined opened immediately these little missives; others more edacious dropped them aimlessly, unnoticing. Those who read, and directly afterwards those who hadn't, in the excitement and babble that followed scarce gave a thought to refreshment. Down did they set their plates as loudly they voiced their congratulations, for the bit of

folded paper contained nothing of less import than the announcement of the engagement of Emma Simkins to Joe Kuntz.

When, some time after, refreshments having been eaten and plates removed, the Reverend Mr. Seton, asking for a moment's silence, announced that the marriage of the couple whose engagement had just been made known would take place immediately, the license having long since been procured, excitement almost equaled in heat the June night itself.

Mrs. Simkins had a second attack of uncertainness which Mrs. Jones, still by her side, abated successfully as before by supporting her for a moment; Mr. Simkins from his seat outside, streaked through the house up to his elder daughter, demanding with ludicrous dignity the meaning of it all; Myra, in the secret since that early morning trolley ride, sat quite serene, looking innocent seventeen.

Joe, meanwhile, had made his way to Emma's side; and while Pa Simkins held firmly to Emma's hand and Ma Simkins hysterically gripped Joe's as in a vise, the minister approached and performed the short though impressive ceremony of his church. When Joe slipped the gold band on Emma's finger Mrs. Simkins burst out crying.

"You're not going to take her away, Joe," she pleaded.

"No. Not for a while, I guess. We thought maybe you'd like to have another man around to worry you," Joe explained.

"And I would! I would!" exclaimed Mrs. S. through her tears. "I always did like you, Joe," she added.

Then all the guests at this surprise wedding came up in turn to shake hands with the bride and groom and to wish them the trite things customary with the stereotyped on such occasions.

"How about commencement?" inquired Mrs. Jones, as she squeezed Emma's hand painfully in her excitement. "Ain't you going to graduate with Carrie?"

"I'm afraid Joe would not be able to spare me long enough;" then she leaned over and let out as some do when over happy. "There was something off anyway with my grades," she confided. "Ask Carrie when you see her."

"And to think I was a-bleachin' a weddin' dress," stammered Mrs. Brown, close by the bride of the evening.

"That you were a-what?" questioned Emma incisively, only half catching the remark.

"Never you mind, dearie, I was just a-dreamin'. Here's your ma again," as Mrs. Simkins came up.

"What's this, Em, 'bout your graduatin'? Ain't you goin' to graduate?"

"I'm afraid not, Mother. You see it was Emma Simkins that did the studying, now Emma Kuntz can't take all the credit," she dissimulated just a shade.

"And your essay," anxiously went on Mrs. Simkins; "ain't you goin' to read it?"

"No, Mother. But don't worry; the essay has never been written. I planned this little surprise party way back in May. So after it was all arranged I stopped bothering my head about the essay. Why, you dear goose," she said, taking her mother's face between her hands, "don't you know that's why I changed the date of the party? I wanted, oh, I wanted so bad to be a June day bride."

Emma and Joe began housekeeping at "Mar's" after all. Mrs. Simkins with two men folks in the house doubtless was at times a victim of nerves; but she never again admitted even to herself that she was *worried*. Joe proved to be so valuable a member of the household and offered so freely of his earnings that many of Mrs. Simkins' anxieties were entirely dissipated.

As Mrs. Brown took leave of Mrs. Simkins that night at the door after all the other guests had departed, she whispered regretfully:

"If I'd just have known that was a-goin' to be a weddin' dress you was a-goin' to buy, I'd

have insisted on dotted mull. It's so handsome."

"But not a soul of us knew," answered Mrs. Simkins, disappointment in not having been consulted forcing itself through the joy of the outcome of it all. "Not a soul of us knew 'ceptin' those three early mornin' street-car plotters."

That night, or rather early the next morning, for it was *late* before they retired, Mrs. Simkins informed her attentive better-half that the evening had saved him exactly two dollars and a half.

"How's that?" inquired he.

"No graduatin', no ribbon sash," laconically explained she.

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